United Nations E/CN.6/2000/PC/6/Add.3

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
21 February 2000

Original: English

Preparatory Committee for the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"
Third session
3-17 March 2000
Item 2 of the provisional agenda*
Preparations for the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Results of regional meetings held in preparation for the special session of the General Assembly

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

Second Arab meeting to follow up the Beijing Conference (Beirut, 12-15 December 1998)**

* E/CN.6/2000/PC/1.
** The report of the meeting is being issued as received in the language of submission only.

00-30760 (E) 250200

Distr.
GENERAL
E/ESCWA/SD-WOM/1998/1
21 January 1999
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: ARABIC

FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Second Arab Meeting for Follow-up to the Beijing Conference
Beirut, 12-15 December 1998

CONTENTS

		Paragraph	*Page*
I.	**ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING**	1-12	3
	A. Venue and dates	1	3
	B. Objectives	2-3	3
	C. Participants	4-5	3
	D. Opening Session	6-9	4
	E. Election of officers	10	4
	F. Organization of work	11	4
	G. Results of the Meeting	12	4
II.	**TOPICS OF DISCUSSION**	13-36	6
	A. Theme one: Preparation of reports to be presented to a special session of the General Assembly as follow-up to the Beijing Conference	14-23	6
	B. Theme two: Capacity building to accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action	24-30	8
	C. Theme three: Capacity for gender maintaining	31-36	9
III.	**FINAL SESSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**	37-46	11
	A. Recommendations relating to the framework for national reports A questionnaire to governments on implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and model for national plan of action, with a vision for equality between women and men for the third millennium	42	11

CONTENTS (*continued*)

		Paragraph	*Page*
B.	Recommendations on setting guidelines for the establishment of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of Arab women	43	11
C.	Recommendations on the role of non-governmental organizations in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action	44	12
D.	Recommendations for a model plan of action for inclusion of gender issues in mainstreaming activities at the national level	45	13
E.	General recommendations	46	13

ANNEXES

I.	List of participants	14
II.	Organization of work	27
III.	List of documents	29
IV.	Questionnaire to Governments on Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action	30
V.	A vision for gender equality in the next millennium	42
VI.	Guidelines for institutionalization of national machinery for the advancement of women	49

I. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

A. VENUE AND DATES

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) of the United Nations, the League of Arab States (LAS) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) convened jointly the Second Arab Meeting for Follow-up to the Beijing Conference, in Beirut, from 12 to 15 December 1998.

B. OBJECTIVES

2. The Second Arab Meeting for Follow-up to the Beijing Conference, was a regional meeting to prepare for the special session of the General Assembly to be convened from 5 to 9 June 2000 to review what has been achieved five years after the Fourth World Conference on Women, held at Beijing, from 4 to 15 September 1995 (Beijing Conference). The aim of the Meeting was to assist Arab States with the following: (a) appropriate and timely preparation of national reports on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and developing national plans of action with a vision for gender equality in the next millennium; (b) institution building, especially of national machinery to accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action; and (c) capacity-building to strengthen the role of non-governmental organizations in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and to enhance collaboration with government bodies in mainstreaming a gender perspective into policies, plans and programmes. In addition, the Meeting served as a forum for reviewing and assessing progress achieved, defining obstacles encountered and identifying key challenges to the implementation of the Platform. The Meeting dealt with the priorities that directly concern Arab women, in accordance with what was shown in the Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2005 (1994) and Arab Programme for Action (1996), with the aim of providing a vision for equality between women and men in the region during the third millennium on the threshold of the twenty-first century.

3. More specifically, the Meeting sought to provide ESCWA members with the necessary ways and means of (a) facilitating the task of preparing reports to be submitted to the special session; (b) building the national institutional machinery necessary for accelerating the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action; and (c) capacity-building to strengthen the role of non-governmental organizations in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and to enhance collaboration with government bodies in mainstreaming a gender perspective into policies, plans and programmes.

C. PARTICIPANTS

4. Representatives of national ministries and committees concerned with issues relating to women, the family and gender participated in this Meeting from the following countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen as well as Palestine. Representatives attended from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), International Labour Organization (ILO), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank, the Arab Labour Organization within the framework of the League of Arab States, and donors providing bilateral (the Netherlands Trust Fund) and multilateral (Arab Gulf Programme for the United Nations Development Organizations of the (AGFUND)) support.

5. There were 160 participants (see annex I). Ministerial representation was at a high level, being under-secretaries and directors-general of the governmental agencies concerned.

D. Opening Session

6. At the opening session, Mrs. Mouna Hraoui, patron of the Meeting and Chairperson of the National Committee for Follow-up of Lebanese Women's Affairs, stressed the importance of the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly on women. She praised the commendable steps taken by ESCWA together with international and non-governmental organizations and national agencies for the advancement of women in all Arab States. She focused on the importance of the Beijing Conference and its active role in maintaining the urgent need for national authorities to raise the issue of women's rights to the level of national and governmental responsibility, and the need for follow-up mechanisms to verify the implementation by Governments of the recommendations of that Conference. Mrs. Hraoui indicated that the issue of women's rights would not advance without the Governments concerned committing themselves to specific plans and programmes aimed at women's advancement. She added that the follow-up work on the Beijing Conference was central for the review of the situation prevailing in Arab States.

7. The Executive Secretary of ESCWA welcomed the participants and thanked the Government and people of Lebanon for their support of the Commission. The Executive Secretary spoke of the importance of the Meeting and the topics that would be discussed. He said that Arab women were at the front and centre of the process of social and economic nurture; consequently, strategies and national plans must be created for their advancement towards equality with Arab men. The Executive Secretary thanked Mrs. Hraoui, and all the ministers participating in the Meeting for supporting the work and services of the Meeting.

8. Also participating in the opening session was H.E. Ambassador Daou Ali Sweidan, Assistant-Secretary-General for Social Affairs, representing the League of Arab States (LAS). He praised the efforts exerted in the Arab world for the advancement of Arab women through meetings and conferences that have developed work plans and programmes consistent with international trends and aims. He indicated that the Arab Programme of Action for women focused on three basic topics: the economic, (women and overcoming poverty), social, (women and the family); and political (women in decision-making). States had begun to pursue policies aimed at curbing poverty through social development funds by initiating programmes supporting poor families, national mechanisms for achieving justice between women and men and, through legislation, eradication of discrimination. Ambassador Suwaidan emphasized the concern and support of the Arab League for women's affairs.

9. At the same session, Dr Haifa Abu Ghazaleh, Regional Programme Adviser to UNIFEM, noted the positive changes that had occurred in the status of women and the women's movement worldwide over the past 20 years. She reasserted the commitment of the Arab States to work in the areas of the advancement of women, development, use of the Beijing Platform for Action as the basis for national strategies and work plans at the national level, incorporation of the gender perspective into the process of development in all areas and balanced participation in planning development programmes in the Arab countries.

E. Election of Officers

10. Mrs. Hraoui was elected Chairperson of the Meeting. Elected as Vice-Chairpersons were the ministers who were the heads of delegations of Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates. The head of the delegation of Palestine was elected Rapporteur of the Meeting.

F. Organization of Work

11. The organization of work, was approved by the Meeting (see annex II). A drafting committee was formed consisting of the Rapporteur, secretariat of the Meeting (ESCWA, UNIFEM and LAS), government experts and the facilitators of the five working groups.

G. Results of the Meeting

12. The Meeting achieved the following:

(a) Adoption of The Questionnaire to Governments on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (see annex III) to serve as a framework for preparing national reports, consisting of in-depth indicators for monitoring and follow-up of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action;

(b) Adoption of A Model National Plan of Action for Arab States with a vision for gender equality in the next third millennium (annex IV);

(c) Designation of tentative guidelines and basic criteria for the initiation of national institutional mechanisms concerning women;

(d) Designation of practical recommendations and innovative modalities for women who are poor, in addition to providing very small loans for the purpose of alleviating their poverty;

(e) Determination of ways and means for building up the capabilities of non-governmental organizations, increasing their effectiveness and fostering combined work with women's national agencies, and accelerating the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action;

(f) Adoption of a model plan of action for incorporating gender perspective into policies, plans and programmes at the national level in Arab States.

II. TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

13. The studies and documentation presented at the Meeting (annex V), and the discussions on them, dealt with three topics:

(a) Requirements for the preparation of the reports to be submitted to the special session of the General Assembly which will be held to mark the passage of five years after the Beijing Conference;

(b) Institution building, with the aim of accelerating the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action;

(c) Capacity building for gender mainstreaming.

A. THEME ONE: PREPARATION OF REPORTS TO BE PRESENTED TO A SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AS FOLLOW-UP TO THE BEIJING CONFERENCE

14. Three working papers were presented on the topic of the preparation of reports to the special session of the General Assembly. The first was a survey of developments dealing with the Arab woman's status and development in Western Asia 1996-1997. The second was a questionnaire prepared by the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations as a framework for preparing national reports to be presented to the special session in June 2000. The third paper concerned a model national plan of action for the Arab States, consisting of a vision of equality between women and men for the next millennium.

Arab women and development in Western Asia

15. Mrs. Fatima Shaity Kassem, Chief of the Women and Development Unit in ESCWA, presented a paper, which constituted chapter VI of the *Survey on Economic and Social Developments in Western Asia, 1996-1997* issued annually by ESCWA. The concepts of gender and of gender mainstreaming were defined and new trends in the pursuit of participation and equality between women and men were focused on. It was indicated that traditions, values and religious beliefs constituted an important cultural framework for women's participation in the development process. The stage of enabling women to achieve self-reliance and economic independence had begun; women were regarded as agents of change and partners with men in the development process.

16. The situation of Arab women in terms of certain basic indicators, such as education, illiteracy, health, family planning, contribution to economic activity, employment, political participation and decision-taking were discussed in the paper. The study was based on data and statistics compiled by ESCWA from various national and international official sources. Despite the paucity of information available on the status of women in the ESCWA region, improvement had been noted in the areas of education, health and employment compared with the 1970s. But the contribution of women to public life, decision-making and politics was still below required level. As to legal awareness and empowerment of women, they needed more in order to overcome current obstacles, alleviate poverty and achieve economic independence and self-reliance in the broader sense.

17. Discussion on this topic included the following:

(a) Affirming the status of Arab women, within the framework of society and comprehensive development, with emphasis on the quality of development, health, education and economic situation;

(b) Re-examinating and developing indicators on the status of women, in the educational, economic and health fields, so that they would agree with the indicators of the twenty-first century;

(c) Standardizing the data and information issued by the United Nations;

(d) Examining the globalization perspective, which was having a fundamental impact on the role of women in comprehensive development.

A framework for national reports with indicators to monitor the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

18. The questionnaire to Governments on implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action was reviewed in a paper prepared by the Division for the Advancement of Women in consultation with the five regional commissions. ESCWA translated the questionnaire into Arabic to facilitate the preparation of national reports to meet the deadline of 30 April 1999 for submission to the Division.

19. Preliminary national reports on the situation of women in the Arab States participating in the Meeting were presented. The Head of the Department of Women and Family Affairs, in the League of Arab States, presented a report on its activities, and the representative of the Arab Labour Organization presented a study on the Arab family and its social protection. The primary national reports of Arab States participating in the Meeting focused on the following major issues:

(a) The noticeable advancement in most Arab countries, at the level of the education of women compared with men in schools and universities, and in all fields of specialization;

(b) The need for a precise and comprehensive programme to eradicate illiteracy;

(c) The contribution of women to the implementation of comprehensive development programmes has increased, but their participation in planning and follow-up remains limited;

(d) The creation of mechanisms for the advancement of women and mainstreaming a gender perspective into plans and programmes;

(e) Raising awareness of the rights of women as an inalienable part of human rights.

Model for national plans of action for Arab countries, with a vision for gender equality in the next millennium

20. Dr. Hoda Badran, President of the Alliance of Arab Women in Cairo, presented a model national plan of action for the Arab States, to achieve gender equity and equality between women and men on the eve of the twenty-first century. The study for uses on the concept of governance and the situation of Arab women in the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government was studied. The situation of Arab women in these branches remained weak and there was disparity, depending on the country concerned. The reason given was the lack of an organized women's movement, which would enable them to participate effectively in decision-making and governance. Mrs. Badran also enumerated the strategic aims and activities required for achieving the objectives. Among the most important were: empowering Arab women to participate effectively in governance and society; ensuring greater numerical presence in institutions and positions of leadership; enabling them to organize into pressure groups to establish their presence in governance; and to formulate plans of action for Arab countries.

21. There were scenarios for appraising the role of women in development, the most important and optimistic covered governance, sustainable development, alleviation of poverty and equity in distribution of resources. It should also contain the following: a good plan, resources for implementation, a system for follow-up, a women's movement, a common goal, ability and readiness to participate, and criteria and principles for the movement.

22. The Arab States presented their national plans of action in order to exchange experiences and best practices.

23. The discussions and recommendations focused on the following major points:

(a) Use of the expression "third millennium" instead of "the next one thousand years";

(b) Importance of studying the effects of globalization and their repercussions on the status of women;

(c) Emphasis on the importance of democracy in advancing Arab society, and its influence on women's status;

(d) Emphasis on the importance and necessity of Arab solidarity and comprehensive integration in confronting the international and regional transformations of and challenges to Arab society, both men and women;

(e) Encouraging the establishment of an organized movement consisting of men and women in the Arab countries in order to reach a comprehensive formula for women's advancement.

B. THEME TWO: CAPACITY BUILDING TO ACCELERATE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION

24. Two studies were presented on building institutions in order to accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. The first consisted of guidelines and criteria for the institutionalization of national machinery for women and gender equality. The second was on the feasibility and operationalization of microcredit lending facilities for poor women in urban and rural areas in selected Arab countries.

Guidelines to criteria for the institutionalization of national machinery for women and gender equality

25. Mrs. Aida Najjar, consultant and researcher on women and development, presented guidelines for the institutionalization of national machinery for women, which were aimed at involving Arab women in the development process. She proposed basic criteria to promote the advancement of women in the Arab world, from a gender perspective, addressing them to Governments. She examined the conceptual framework regarding institutionalization of national mechanisms. She also gave examples of Arab institutions, their purpose, organizational structure, location, type of leadership and referral authority, for the following States: Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen as well as Palestine. She dealt with positive and negative inferences for setting guidelines for Governments to initiate institutional mechanisms that involved (a) government policies; (b) organizational structure; (c) capacity building, human potential and training; and (d) financial resources and budgeting.

26. Participating Arab States shared their experiences in initiating national machinery for women.

27. Discussions and recommendations focused on the following:

(a) Focusing on institutional machinery, its objectives and location in governments in order to exchange experience and emulate the best practices;

(b) The importance of establishing national machinery to coordinate between women's non-governmental organizations and to support them with human and financial resources.

Feasibility of operationalization of microcredit lending facilities for poor women in urban and rural ar...

28. Mrs. Fatima Sbaity Kassem, Chief of the Women and Development Unit in ESCWA, presented a study prepared by Dr. Camillia Fawzi El-Solh on the feasibility and mode of operation of finance facilities providing very small loans to alleviate poverty among women in urban and rural areas of selected Arab countries. The study had two basic themes. The first related to the extent that micro-credit could alleviate poverty among poor women in rural and urban areas; and the second related to how small loans could empower women. The study was divided into three parts: (a) the rationale for supporting financial facilities providing very small loans and their link with alleviating poverty; (b) the mode of operation of financial

facilities providing very small loans in selected Arab countries, namely Lebanon, Tunisia and Yemen; and (c) recommendations for Governments, United Nations bodies, non-governmental organizations and donors whose policies would influence the connection between very small loans, poverty and gender.

29. Three countries were studied: Lebanon, Tunisia and Yemen. Lebanon was cited as an example of a country with an active non-governmental sector facing challenges to social and economic needs in the post-war phase. Tunisia had considerable experience in the area of micro-credits, while Yemen presented a challenge to institutions providing very small loans under difficult conditions because of a lack of the requisite infrastructure.

30. After the States presented their experiences in that regard, discussion centred on the following important points and recommendations:

(a) Preparation of a study on the feasibility of micro-credit and extent of its impact on alleviating women's poverty;

(b) Designation of a comprehensive plan and special lending programme, and the provision of special funds for financing women's projects in developmental fields;

(c) Stressing the importance of non-governmental organizations for determining women's training needs in special projects and marketing their output;

(d) Necessity of re-examining the philosophy of very small loans and their connection with providing and creating job opportunities to empower poor women;

(e) Preparation of programmes for training women and developing their skills in the areas of feasibility and market studies, and project implementation measures to enable them to implement the non-traditional projects needed by the local markets;

(f) Organization of workshops and training seminars for women on securing loans and optimizing their use;

(g) Ensuring the marketing of output after provision of very small loans to poor women.

C. THEME THREE: CAPACITY FOR GENDER MAINSTREAMING

31. Two working papers were presented on the topic. The first focused on the role of non-governmental organizations in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action; the second focused on formulating a model plan of action for Arab States for gender mainstreaming.

The role of non-governmental organizations in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

32. Dr. Shahida El-Baz presented a study on the role of non-governmental organizations in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. The study included (a) features of non-governmental organizations concerned with women in Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Yemen in areas of activity with a legislative framework; and (b) a critical appraisal of those organizations in the context of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and its interaction with the economic, social, political and cultural conditions prevailing in Arab society. The study specified three basic topics for classifying the activities of non-governmental organizations in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, namely, alleviating poverty, supporting women's political participation and women in the Arab family. The study included other topics dealing with the relationship between non-governmental organizations and Governments and hurdles facing those organizations during the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. The study concluded with recommendations that should lead to strengthening the role of women's non-governmental organizations and building their capacity to accelerate implementations of the Beijing Platform for Action.

33. Discussions and recommendations focused on the following:

(a) The capacities of Governments should be strengthened to help them to develop policies for gender mainstreaming;

(b) A standardized terminology for gender and gender mainstreaming should be developed;

(c) Coordination between non-governmental organizations and between such organizations and Governments for the planning, implementation and follow-up of programmes for the advancement of women should be established at both national and regional levels;

(d) Non-governmental organizations should be provided with training to participate in international and regional conferences and to acquire consultative status with the Economic and Social Council as well as ESCWA;

(e) The presence of youth in non-governmental organizations and professional associations should be encouraged for the continuity of generations;

(f) A special unit for non-governmental organizations should be established within ESCWA and the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States.

Mainstreaming a gender perspective into policies, plans and programmes at the national level: model action plan

34. Mrs. Lina Abu Habib presented a study on the various concepts for gender mainstreaming and the most important strategies needed for gender equality. The study gave examples of experiences in selected countries, namely, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Oman as well as in Palestine. Despite efforts at the administrative and organizational levels, progress had been gradual and gender disaggregated information, continuous exchange of experiences, concurrence on the process of incorporating gender mainstreaming were needed. The study indicated that for development programmes to be successful, it was necessary to allow the effective participation of Arab women in all areas such as equal rights before the law, the right to vote and run for office, equal opportunity, access to resources and capital and basic social services. The study indicated that it was essential for gender mainstreaming to appoint specialists in gender planning, awareness, allocating budget quotas for these activities and monitoring the process.

35. A number of United Nations organizations and specialized agencies presented their experiences in gender mainstreaming issues and activities including: ESCWA, UNIFEM, the World Bank, the Office of Communications and Public Information of the Secretariat, and International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW).

36. Discussions and recommendations focused on the following:

(a) Workshops should be held on gender mainstreaming at the national and regional levels for governments and non-governmental organizations;

(b) The participation women in addition to men in international and national women's conferences should be encouraged;

(c) Standardized Arab indicators should be developed for monitoring and evaluating gender mainstreaming at the national level and cooperation in that area should be established with the Arab and international organizations concerned;

(d) A plan of action should be agreed upon at the regional level for establishing follow-up mechanisms and for supporting the existing mechanisms concerned with women's issues in all Arab States, in addition to cooperating with the Arab and international organizations concerned with gender mainstreaming.

C. FINAL SESSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

37. The participants agreed to merge the first working group with the second working group to review the paper entitled Questionnaire to Governments on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the proposed model for the national plan of action, which included a vision for equality between women and men in the third millennium. The participants were divided into four working groups to review the designated topics and make recommendations.

38. The heads of delegations of Algeria, Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic as well as H.E. Mrs. Inaam Al-Mufti, in her personal capacity as expert in women's affairs and social development, were each appointed Chair of a working group. A rapporteur was elected for each group.

39. In the plenary session, each rapporteur submitted a report on the recommendations agreed upon by the participants in each group, which was then discussed.

40. The drafting committee, consisting of the Rapporteur of the Meeting, the secretariat of the Meeting and the representative of the Sudan, met with representatives of the States participating in the Meeting as well as of the Arab Labour Organization.

41. Mrs. Hraoui chaired the final session. The Rapporteur of the Meeting read out the most important recommendations. After discussion certain changes were made and then the recommendations were adopted as changed.

1st. RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO THE FRAMEWORK FOR NATIONAL REPORTS A QUESTIONNAIRE TO GOVERNMENTS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION AND MODEL FOR NATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION, WITH A VISION FOR EQUALITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

42. The Meeting endorsed the following: *The Questionnaire to Governments on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action* as a framework for preparing the national reports that would be submitted to the special session of the General Assembly and also endorsed the Model National Plan of Action, with a vision for gender equality in the next millennium. In addition to those, the Meeting made the following recommendations:

(a) The concept of governance should be in line with the priorities of the Arab Plan of Action, which focuses on alleviating poverty for women, the role of women in the family, the political participation of women;

(b) The concepts of democracy, justice and human rights should be the basis for gender equity and equality;

(c) Non-governmental organizations and the private sector should be involved in preparing the plan of action, and translating it into programmes of action and projects;

(d) Arab funds, United Nations bodies and donors should be urged to provide technical and material support for the implementation of the Plan of Action.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS ON SETTING GUIDELINES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF ARAB WOMEN

43. The Meeting adopted the proposed Guidelines to establish and strengthen institutional mechanisms for the advancement of Arab women (annex VI), and made the following recommendations:

(a) A central national authority or mechanism should be established or, if one exists it should be strengthened, and linked directly to the highest executive authority to serve as a referral authority representing government, non-governmental organizations and other institutions of civil society concerned

with the advancement of women, and a chairperson should be appointed for this mechanism at the highest decision-making level;

(b) Mechanisms within the concerned ministries should be established and those already existing should be strengthened to share the responsibility with the national mechanism in the planning, implementation, follow-up and appraisal of the Plan of Action;

(c) An institutional mechanism for follow-up should be developed, which includes ESCWA, UNIFEM, the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States, government agencies and the concerned non-governmental organizations in the Arab States;

(d) Human and institutional capacity should be built and continuously developed to meet global challenges;

(e) Sufficient resources should be allocated for mechanisms concerned with the advancement of women, both governmental and non-governmental, incorporating them into the budget of the State and into the Plan, and earmarked for activities concerning women;

(f) Regional, Arab and international organizations, funds and private institutions should be urged to contribute to funding activities relating to women, gender issues and gender equality, so as to accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, and specifically income-generating projects that help to alleviate poverty among women and improve the quality of life for the family.

C. Recommendations on the role of non-governmental organizations in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

44. The Meeting made the following recommendations:

(a) A mechanism for cooperation and coordination between governmental and non-governmental organizations should be established and their efforts combined to accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and to make mass use of media communications for raising awareness of gender issues;

(b) Non-governmental organizations should be invited to establish a mechanism for lobbying parliaments on gender mainstreaming;

(c) Non-governmental organizations involved in the care and welfare of women should be invited to develop their aims and train their personnel within the scope of operations, so as to contribute to gender mainstreaming in the development process;

(d) Non-governmental organizations operating in the same field, at the national and regional levels, should be invited to network in order to exchange experience and information, and coordination of joint activities in preparation for the special session of the General Assembly;

(e) Non-governmental organizations should be encouraged to obtain consultative status in the Economic and Social Council and join the network of such organizations cooperating with the Department of Public Information of the United Nations;

(f) Women, especially the poor in rural and urban areas, should be encouraged and trained to join grassroots organizations with economic and social aims, and to share in the determination and selection of the mechanisms appropriate for their implementation;

(g) Training handbooks on gender should be prepared in Arabic, reflecting the specificity of the Arab world, and training of trainers should be provided including the personnel of non-governmental organizations;

(h) ESCWA, UNIFEM and the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States should be invited to hold workshops on ways and means of ensuring that non-governmental organizations concerned with women become acquainted with the contents of the Beijing Platform for Action, Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2005 and the Arab Programme for Action, and should make use of the Arab media in this regard;

(i) A legal environment conducive to non-governmental organizations, should be provided to ensure their independence and ability to take the initiative and move towards achieving the incorporation of gender mainstreaming and development programmes.

D. Recommendations for a model plan of action for inclusion of gender issues in mainstreaming activities at the national level

45. The Meeting made the following recommendations:

(a) A policy of gender mainstreaming and equality should be adopted in development plans at the national level;

(b) Socio-economic surveys and studies should be undertaken and gender-disaggregated information gathered and analysed by age group for use in gender planning;

(c) Seminars and training workshops should be held on concepts of gender and gender mainstreaming at the national level;

(d) Gender focal points should be established in official institutions in non-governmental organizations to work on incorporating gender mainstreaming;

(e) Indicators should be developed for monitoring and evaluating the implementation and follow-up of gender mainstreaming in national plans, policies, programmes and activities;

(f) ESCWA, UNIFEM and the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States should be called upon to introduce mechanisms for the exchange of information and experiences on gender mainstreaming.

E. General recommendations

46. The Meeting made the following recommendations:

(a) All forms of violence should be combated, especially against women in certain countries under the Israeli occupation and siege, including women refugees, prisoners and detainees in Israeli prisons, and victims of social violence of whatever form;

(b) The role of non-governmental organizations should be strengthened to enable them to face the challenges posed by Israeli aggression and occupation of Palestine, the Golan Heights and south Lebanon, and by the siege of Iraq, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and the Sudan, and to overcome the effects of the occupation on Arab women and children.

47. The participants proposed submitting a telegram thanking His Excellency President Emile Lahhoud, President of Lebanon, for his generous hospitality.